



HINDSIGHT

Samuel Alden Frazar, Duxbury Shipwright

By Jody Morgan

"Nevertheless, taking advantage of a thick and foggy night, a schooner, laden with fish, and belonging to Mr. Samuel A. Frazar, succeeded in an attempt to escape...." Not a bad beginning for a historical novel, I think. But this intriguing quotation is embedded in the body of Justin Winsor's "History of the Town of Duxbury." Aside from the information that Samuel Frazar reopened a shipyard originally belonging to Israel Sylvester, little else appears about him in the various accounts of Duxbury history. What beyond the skeletal details of the vital records bears testimony to who this evader of the embargo blockade was?

Born in 1766, Samuel Alden Frazar (spelled also Frazier, Frazier and Frasher), was the son of Thomas Frasher of Marshfield and Rebeckah (spelled also Rebecca) Alden. The only mention of his father's name in the Town Meeting Records occurs in 1783, when the town voted to take poll tax from Thomas Frazar in Capt. Seth Bradford bills.

Duplicate entries in the church register note that Samuel Frazar married Abigail Drew on December 15, 1790, or December 15, 1791. On March 17, 1794, the following article appears in the warrant: "To see if the town will grant Samuel Frazar the privilege of building vessels on the landing which lies near Captain Nathan Sampson's supposed to belong to said town of Duxbury." An affirmative vote is recorded on April 5.

When the controversial Bluefish River Bridge project first came up for discussion in 1800, Frazar was appointed to the committee to plan the structure "with flood gates 25 feet wide and flume convenient for a Mill or Mills." Again in 1801, he was asked to help estimate the cost of construction, and, in 1803, to serve on the committee to

inspect Joshua Winsor's completed bridge.

The dam included in the Bluefish River Bridge design created the millpond in front of the property occupied by Frazar's house and shipyard. The bounds of the road "from the north end of the Dike of the new Bridge to the mouth of the lane near Saml A. Frazer's" were accepted on June 4, 1804. However, numerous requests to reconsider the route are recorded thereafter. The first, a petition by Frazar to cope with the curve at the intersection of what is now Anchorage Lane and St. George St. suggests an alteration "so as to make a convenient road 30 feet by taking a part of the land front of the house formerly occupied by Nathan Samson which now makes a greater crook in the road below which is now flowed the tide...."

Tragedy struck the Frazar family in 1807. The oldest son, Thomas, a teenager, died on June 24. Six months later, the Embargo Act shut down all of Duxbury's shipyards. While I have not yet found confirmation of Justin Winsor's account of Frazar's response to the embargo, purchases made by the shipwright in October of 1808 indicate that he was not impoverished by the ban on trade.

Church pews, at that time, were bought by the faithful and the deeds were entered in the town records. On October 8, 1808, Samuel A. Frazar bought three pews in the Duxbury Meetinghouse: #23, a wall pew in the front gallery, for \$60; #89, on the lower floor, for \$177; and #76, at the southeast corner of the lower floor, for \$70. Location in seating, like location in real estate, dictated value. Considering that the town had managed in 1800 to build an entire schoolhouse

fit to function for three quarters of a century for only \$200, the Frazar pew purchases represented a significant expenditure.

Volunteering has always been an important occupation for Duxbury residents. No pay was granted for service in the various town posts which Samuel A. Frazar occupied through the next 30 years, including surveyor of lumber, school agent, surveyor of highways, and even Hogreeve. A one time-only opportunity placed Frazar on an 1810 committee with Ezra Weston, Rufus Hathaway,

will, Frazar was one of the five original trustees of the bequest of \$10,000 left by Partridge to the Town of Duxbury to establish the school which the community named Partridge Academy. If Frazar's character can be judged by the company he kept, he must have been a worthy citizen. The four other trustees were Rev. John Allyn, D.D. of Duxbury, Rev. Zephaniah Willis of Kingston, Rev. James Kendall of Plymouth, and John Sever of Kingston.

Ship builder and ship owner, Frazar is also credited by E. Waldo Long as having held an interest in the grist mill at the Bluefish River. Justin Winsor notes in his section on the fishing business that Frazar, in partnership with Levi Sampson and George Loring, purchased the wharf built by Joshua Winsor.

At the age of 72, Samuel Alden Frazar died on August 28, 1838. Less than a month later, his only unwed daughter, Mercy, followed him to the grave. Five sons, including a second Thomas and a Samuel A., Jr., as well as three daughters, married and carried on the line.

The home they knew as children is being lovingly restored by Trish and Freeman Boynton to house their own growing family.

The oldest part of the house, closest to St. George St., may have been built in the mid-18th century. The center section probably dates from the early 19th century. Who the original builders were will be revealed in time, but only after the patient research necessary for date-boarding the house has been completed. However, thanks to the Boyntons' care, another generation of Duxbury residents will enjoy the legacy of Samuel A. Frazar, shipwright, who dared to slip a cargo of fish past an armed schooner on a foggy 1808 night.



Restoring Samuel A. Frazar's home, the Boyntons are carefully preserving the architectural details, including the original panes of glass.

Seth Sparague, Reuben Drew, Abner Dingley, and Judah Alden "to introduce the kine or cow tax."

When the town decided to erect a poorhouse in 1818, Samuel A. Frazar was chosen to serve on the building committee. Subsequently, he served repeatedly on the board of Overseers of the Almshouse. He also held a place on the committee to set the salary of the minister during Rev. John Allyn's tenure.

Among his friends, Samuel Frazar counted the Honorable George Partridge. Named as one of two executors of the latter's